

REBEL DESTINY

824 Later, through the gathering darkness, the people of the
796 neighboring villages went home, paddling their boats which
were loaded down with the fish that had been netted. And
[423] from this time on, everyone knew that this neku vine was
[428] the property of him who had found it, and of his family,
down through his mother's line, forever.

"Ai, mati, you would have seen something, if you had
got here for the neku dance!"

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361 Like any other Bush Negro village, S'ei was a series of
sandy clearings about which were grouped huts of woven
palm fronds and palm thatch. All about was the big bush.
[487] The trails which led from the village were each guarded
[789] by a magically treated palm azang, and shrines to the
ancestral spirits who saw to it that evil was kept away.
Where the several paths led, a stranger was not encouraged
to discover. Down one, women were to be seen disappearing
[482] in the morning with trays on their heads, their infants
astride their backs, held inside the folds of a cloth which
was fastened high above their breasts, and caught up again
below them. In many upper river villages, this path led
to the fields, some distance away. Others were the way to
[778] shrines, erected to those spirits which must be worshiped
outside the village. Another path might lead to a brook,
which the villagers held sacred. There were trails, too,
which connected neighboring villages, and led perhaps
farther yet, but for the stranger, the highway was the river,
and no matter how short the distance between one settle-
ment and another, he was not invited to make his way
through the bush.

"You do not want to go through the bush, white man.
In the bush are evil spirits," we heard many times.

A village clearing was divided into quarters. Each quarter
was inhabited by one of the *mbe*, or extended families, and
361 the quarter bore its name. It was composed of several house-
592 holds—five or six or more, depending upon the size of the

423 /15 cont. / Thus it was at
643 the time of the Lawa gold rushes (1890) that Grand Man Anato
[648] caused rent to be paid by the Creole miners who were settling in
the region. But this practice, excessive when the small portion
of this territory actually occupied by the Boni is considered, ended
423 up by falling into disuse. Nowadays things have fallen into the
648 opposite extreme, and the Boni find themselves having no right,
178 customary or otherwise, over the country of their ancestors; the
first comer, even of the Creoles from the British West Indies, can
settle anywhere, dislocating the apportionment of the land among
lineages. This situation has been harmful to the life of the tribe
by contributing to the scattering of the peopling. Perhaps it is
not too late to remedy the situation. An /16/ /Figure 2 appears
here/ /17/ African tribe cannot live wholesomely if there are no
definite relationships, entailing unquestioned rights, between the
group and the land.

423 The following modus vivendi has been in force for many
619 years:

• [486] a) The Djuka may circulate freely across Boni country, but
[666] they may not establish villages in it; if they wish to make clearings
there, they must ask for permission from the grand man.

[226] Otherwise they have the right to fish on the Tanpok and the
waki.

423 b) The Creoles may settle anywhere and make their clear-
648 ings where the lands are not used. But that does not modify in
the minds of the Boni the lineages' rights over the land; this
occupation is regarded as creating no new right; for example, the
Doglis habitation is built on the lands of Kormotibo village.

423 c) The Boni reserve for themselves along with the Oayana
648 Indians the exclusive right to fish on the Litani and the Maruini.
822 On these rivers the Djuka do not have the right to penetrate.
[619]

162 The Boni may be computed at a little less than 1,000 persons
all told.